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May 2012



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Mothering, Mentoring, and Mercy

The Gospel in Ascension
Go and Tell



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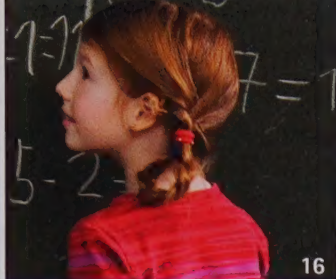


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VOICES

Tomato Evangelist

by Terri Lackey

This month in Chicago

it's tomato planting time. O, I get so excited about planting tomatoes, and even more happy when they begin to bloom and grow. I take photos of my earliest budding tomatoes and share them on Facebook. And when they ripen, I share them with people.

Throughout the summer, I post photos of my bounty on social media sites, partly to brag, partly to share the good news of my harvest.

I am a tomato evangelist.

Like the preacher on the busy street corner in Brooke Petersen's story, "Go and Tell," I shout my message whether any care to receive it. But a gift awaits those who pay attention, who listen.

"Claiming our identity as evangelists can bring on fear and anxiety," Petersen writes, "But telling the story of our faith isn't optional. Jesus doesn't tell those who recognize him on that Easter morning that, if it is convenient, they might consider telling the good news to the people they see."

Like angels, we are messengers sent by God to spread good news. In "Close Encounters of the Angelic Kind," Maggie Rourk writes that angels impart all sorts of good news and truths to people, albeit often with the admonition: *Now, don't let me scare you, but...*

"Angels in the Bible are sent by the God who loved them and made them in order to impart to us God's truths," she writes. "Those truths comfort, strengthen and protect us, tethering us to the holy heart. . ." Angels also can serve as

our mentors, Nancy Goldberger writes in "Mothering, Mentoring, and Mercy." An angel was waiting at the tomb where Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were going to complete the custom of anointing Jesus' body for burial.

"This young man, who we believe to be an angel, helps them understand what they must do," Goldberger writes. "The angel says, 'But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you' (Mark 16:6-7)."

The message the women are to tell Jesus' friends is that his body is no longer in the tomb. In May, we observe the Ascension of our Lord and the beginning of Pentecost. An article by Gail Ramshaw, Lutheran scholar of liturgical language, explains the feast days of Ascension and Pentecost and the evangelist Luke's take on them.

Luke "used creative symbolic imagery to narrate the Christian feast days of Ascension and Pentecost," Ramshaw writes. "Some 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Luke penned our lectionary readings for Ascension Day (Luke 24:44-53 and Acts 1:1-11) and Pentecost (Acts 2:1-21)."

This month, we conclude the Rev. Patricia Lull's Bible study on the Gospel of Mark. During these nine sessions, we've learned that it is regular folks like you and me who are charged to spread the good news. Lull sends us off with a good message: "Go and tell." 🌿

Terri Lackey is managing editor of *Gather*.



GIVE US THIS DAY

From the Sidelines

by Michelle Heinrich

Go! Run! Get the ball!

Turn it around! Way to go! These cheers for kids on the soccer field last fall were from parents on the sidelines. I threw in a few of my own as I watched my daughter Jennifer play.

It's great to see parents show such enthusiasm for their kids. We enjoy seeing them excel. When our kids are on the field, court, or arena, we cheer our hearts out. We yell out directions louder than their coaches. We need to guide them, even though they have a coach. We want to see them do well.

What if we did that every day—including Sunday?

What would you think of the mom who cheered her child as he went to Sunday school? "Way to go, Jon! Great job in getting up early on Sunday morning when you could sleep in!" Or "Way to go in remembering to bring your offering—woo hoo!"

Maybe that sounds over the top. But guiding our children and cheering them on is what we signed up for when we became parents. When we had our children baptized, we also signed up for certain duties. Read the Order of Baptism from *Evangelical Lutheran Worship*.

"As you bring your children to receive the gift of baptism, you are entrusted with responsibilities:

*to live with them among God's faithful people,
bring them to the word of God and the holy supper,
teach them the Lord's Prayer, the Creed, and the*

*Ten Commandments,
place in their hands the holy Scriptures,
and nurture them in faith and prayer. . ."*

We have been given a lot of responsibility as parents. Sometimes our kids don't want to go to church—and we might cave and let them stay home. Do our kids believe Sunday school or worship is important to us? A priority?

They see us making it to sports practices during the week, and getting up for Saturday 8 a.m. games. We drive each kid to where he or she needs to be—except sometimes on Sunday morning. Children need us to be their guides, coaches, and cheerleaders in every aspect of their lives. At their baptism, we made a promise to raise them as Christians; not just on Sunday morning, but every day.

Why can't we be "louder" than the pastor or Sunday school teacher when guiding them? Maybe we feel inadequate when we sharing our faith and so we shy away from it. We could be better "Sunday coaches" to our kids if we attended adult Sunday school, read Scripture, joined a book group or Bible study, and attended worship regularly. These things are available to us. Maybe we don't want to further our walk with God because that would require work. But gathered together, we can encourage each other on our journey.

So here's my cheer for you: "Great job getting your teenager out of bed to go to confirmation! Way to go in getting up early and helping everyone get dressed for Sunday school! Nice job with assisting at worship! Keep up the good work! WOO-HOO!" 🌿

Michelle Heinrich is youth and family coordinator at Faith Lutheran Church, Rochelle, Ill.

Silent Proclamations

by Twila Schock

"And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere...." (Mark 16:30)

Do you wonder what makes some missionaries particularly good missionaries? What is it that would cause Jesus to give a good performance review to a missionary?

As a former ELCA missionary who today serves as the ELCA's primary fundraiser for missionaries, I am often compelled to ask this question.

Our Bible study ends rather up-beat as the missionary task begins: "And they went out and proclaimed the good news everywhere."

It is corroborated later in Acts 4:20, when Peter and John zealously announce, "We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

But, in all fairness to our missionaries, I would like to differ with these early missionaries for just a moment.

I have known missionaries who must serve invisibly. If their title of missionary were known in their context of service, they would be expelled from the country where they serve. With these missionaries, I have edited my correspondence, ensuring that words such as *church*, *Christian*, *Bible*, and *mission* did not appear. How would Jesus rate these folks? As faithful servants? Or, would he upbraid them for their lack of faith?

I, for one, would side with the missionaries! I have my own story to share.



A DOUBLE KNOT

From 1997 to 2000, I served as a missionary in Russia. These were tumultuous times as political regimes and their economy crashed, not once, but twice. President Boris Yeltsen, to prevent Russian Orthodox Christians from being proselytized, had signed into effect a law "On Freedom of Conscience and Religious Associations." What this law said was: "If your church was not registered with the Soviet government during

the Communist era, you may not be an official church today. Further, if a missionary is not a part of a registered church, that missionary gets sent home."

The congregation where I served at the time, the Moscow Protestant Chaplaincy, had only existed within the walls of the U.S. Embassy as a congregation for the diplomatic community. It was not yet recognized as a legal church. We were not in a good position.

Our hands were tied with a double knot. The second knot was tied when the U.S. Embassy, in an effort to keep our ministry vital, asked us to sign a memorandum of understanding. Essentially, this memo said: "Yes, we the U.S. Embassy will keep you safely under our umbrella. But, under no circumstances will you preach the gospel to Russian people. If you do, we drop our support of you, the ministry closes, and you return to the United States." What could we do? We signed it.

How would Jesus have rated us? What kind of missionaries in Russia would promise to not preach the gospel to Russians?

Jesus did weigh in on this matter. But, not in the way one might have expected. Of course, now I am getting ahead of the story.

THE GRANDMOTHERS

Why was this ministry so impor-

tant? To be sure, it continued to serve the diplomatic community, but in this tumultuous time in the life of Russia, it served an even greater purpose. It served grandmothers—*babushky*—1,000 a day. The *babushky* were Russian grandmothers to whom the Communist Party had promised a retirement with bread, butter, eggs, a home, a telephone, and an annual vacation if they would serve the Soviet state. But, when the economy collapsed for the second time, the grandmothers found themselves with only enough money each month to buy a few loaves of bread.

And so, we served soup, *borschch*, and we served buckwheat, *gretchka*, and we served cheese dumplings, *syrniki*. And, we served a lot of it; in those days, 1,500 people a day. If our ministry was closed, we had a lot to lose, as did the *babushky* of Russia.

We signed the agreement. We voluntarily allowed our missionary hands to be tied. "And what," we thought, "would the people back home say if they knew?" What choice did we have?

A BOWL OF SOUP

One day Sophia, after smacking my cheeks with the Russian triple-kiss, grabbed me by the hands and pulled me through the kitchens to meet our clients, her friends.

"This woman," she said, "This

woman was a doctor, a professor of medicine at the university. She worked so hard her whole life. Now, look at her...so skinny. Having to eat here, a beggar!"

One woman was known nationwide as a ballerina. She danced at the Bolshoi Theatre. "Now, with

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no money to feed her in her old age," Sophia continued, "no one wants to remember her anymore, so she washes dishes here ... in exchange for food."

Then she pointed at another woman, who was spooning half of her soup into a jar so she could take it home and stretch it for two meals. "This woman," she said, "is the daughter of a famous poet. Her family helped to make our nation great. Look at her!"

Yes, we signed the agreement. Our lips to proclaim the gospel among Russians were sealed. Or, were they? It was a dismal time in the life of Russia to proclaim hope, but just as the light of a candle seems so much greater in a dark room, a simple bowl of soup takes on a whole new meaning in an empty stomach.

In a bleak economy, one bowl had the power to remove the ache from hunger pangs. And, if served with a smile and a touch, one bowl had the power to restore dignity to a wounded people. And, if served in the name of Christ, one bowl of soup had an even greater power. But, our hands were tied. Our lips, silent. Or, were they?

A HOLY PLACE

The babushky were survivors of the system. They knew the threat under which we were serving. They also knew who had sent us. Wrin-

kled and weathered by life, they heard our silence. But they also heard the message behind the soup.

One day, one of the babushky broke the silence. She broke it, not with her lips, but with her whole arthritic body. As she crossed the threshold of the kitchen to leave, she turned, eyes intense, like steel.

She made the sign of the cross on herself three times, bowing each time she did it. Not one word was said. Not one word needed saying. Anyone living in Russia recognizes that as the gesture one makes when entering or leaving a church or a holy place.

Through a bowl of soup, this woman had encountered Christ. She had bestowed the same dignity upon our sometimes cockroach-infested soup kitchen as she would upon her icon-gilded church. And, all of the grandmothers saw it.

Through this woman's witness, Jesus had weighed in and redeemed our clumsy attempts at witness with the truth of the gospel.

THE STONES

In the Gospel according to Luke, Jesus rebukes the Pharisees, who want his disciples to stop their proclamation. Jesus says, "I tell you, if these were silent, the stones would shout out" (Luke 19:40).

These words of Jesus rebuking the Pharisees form the very core of the power of the gospel. Even if

the religious leaders of the day succeeded in silencing Jesus' disciples, the story of God acting through history would not be contained. "If these were silent, the stones would shout out."

The urgency of this gospel message communicates hope to each of us as we attempt to be Christ's ambassadors in a challenging time in our own country's history.

"If these were silent, the stones would shout out."

This is the gospel. We can be silenced by laws. We can be silenced by the rules of our workplace. We can be silenced by our own fear or depression. We can go to the other extreme and dress up the gospel in loud gimmickry, so that it is obscured. But somehow, whether

it is through a bowl of soup or through the stones that surround us, God will proclaim that message.

As we stand at the grave of a loved one, the stones shout out, "One grave is already empty," they say.

As we hear the hard words that we've lost our jobs, the stones shout out. "In God's eyes you're a more precious than gold," they say.

Cradling a newborn and experiencing the awe of new life, the stones shout out. "Hail to the giver of life!"

Sitting in the privacy of our homes with our secret sorrows, the stones shout out to each of us. "Peace! Peace be with you!"

"How can we keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard?" Through their boldness, our missionary forebears, Peter and

John, challenge each of us to be missionaries. They prod us into action. They remind us that the gospel is not a gift to be received and kept unto ourselves.

The message of our gracious and loving God is too powerful to be snuffed out. For even if we go so far as to sign an agreement with a government to be silent, the very stones will shout out.

And, as the stones shout out the proclamation of God's grace, one stone will be rolled back. One grave is empty. One promise of everlasting life will be made known.

And, like the followers in Mark's Gospel, we too can proclaim the good news everywhere. 🕊

The Rev. Twila Schock is director for ELCA missionary sponsorship.

Whoever becomes humble like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 18:4).

At age 9, Emilie, the daughter of ELCA missionaries in Japan, gives witness to her non-Christian classmates.

"You know Christmas isn't just about gifts and Santa," Emilie tells them, "it's about the greatest gift given to all of us — Jesus."

She then explains that Jesus is God's Son, he died and rose for our sins and what that means for you and me. They listened intently, asked questions and seemed amazed. What a living, daring confidence in God's grace, to tell these children — who had never heard the name Jesus — what he has done for us. ELCA missionaries make a world of difference. To sponsor a missionary contact 800-638-3522, ext. 2657, or visit www.elca.org/missionarysponsorship.



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FAMILY MATTERS

Mother Power

by Elyse Nelson Winger

Just weeks after her husband's assassination, on Mother's Day in 1968, Coretta Scott King spoke before thousands and gave a "Mother Power" speech. According to *The New York Times*, she "hoped to enlist the support of 'black women, white women, brown women and red women—all the women of this nation—in a campaign of conscience' to uplift the lives and opportunities of the poor" ("5,000 Open Poor People's Campaign in Washington," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1968).

She spoke prophetically, provocatively: "Our Congress passes laws which subsidize corporation farms, oil companies, airlines and houses for suburbia ... but when it turns its attention to the poor it suddenly becomes concerned about balancing the budget."

From there, she joined thousands of other women in a march through the streets of Washington, inaugurating the Poor People's Campaign organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. In our day, when 2010 census data reveals that almost one in two Americans are poor or low-income (meaning that a family of four makes less than \$45,000 a year), King's words sting and convict. Where is "Mother Power" today? And will it be on display for Mother's Day 2012?

I am a child of the 70s, the daughter of a feminist. I learned at a young age to identify all mothers as working women, in or outside the home. And soon after I memorized The Lord's Prayer, I had committed a different kind of verse to

memory: "It will be a great day when the schools have all the money they need and the Air Force has to hold a bake sale to buy a bomber." This declaration, printed on gold paper, was pasted on the wall next to my mother's washing machine, a location that evoked the dialectic of domesticity and activism she modeled for her daughters.

Mom was a traditional wife and mother who cleaned the house, cooked all of the meals, did all of the shopping, washed and ironed all of the laundry, and drove her daughters all over town. She was also shaped profoundly by the women's movement and the Lutheran Christian tradition. She had "Mother Power." But I doubt she ever heard that from us on the second Sunday in May, the day when millions of Americans shower their mothers with corsages and chocolates. That's because my mother didn't give one iota about Mother's Day. To her, it was a day concocted by the forces of commercialism... and she was almost right.

Mother's Day is the product of an unforeseen combination of religion, consumerism, and nationalism. It was first birthed in 1872 by Julia Ward Howe as an international day for peace and action and then reborn by a group of evangelical Christian women determined to lift up mothers' faith and work for the common good. But the day was soon co-opted and commercialized by the floral industry, and then enshrined as a civic holiday by presidential decree. In 1914, Woodrow Wilson signed a proclamation inviting "the people of the United States

to display the flag at their homes or other suitable places on the second Sunday of May as a public expression of our love and reverence for the mothers of our country.”

From that time on, Mother’s Day has been big business. In 2011, in a survey conducted by the National Retail Foundation, Americans reported that they expected to spend \$16.3 billion on presents: jewelry and clothes, restaurants and roses. No wonder this holiday didn’t resonate much with my mom. It didn’t for me, either, until I became a mother.

In the early years, before my kids were old enough to give construction paper cards and pretty bouquets, Stewart was the bearer of good gifts, which came in the form of long afternoon naps without an alarm clock in sight. In recent years, I’ve truly enjoyed Sunday brunches and beaming children’s faces as I open their gifts. I’ve presided at worship and led the congregation in a blessing for mothers and all those “who provide motherly care.” And I’ve offered prayer for those for whom this day brings struggle: children estranged or grieving, women longing to conceive or adopt, mothers living in conflict with their kids.

Yet still I have questioned: shouldn’t I be resisting the consumer culture of Mother’s Day? Shouldn’t we in the church be praying for and advocating for mothers

week in and week out? Shouldn’t we be sharing a prophetic word about motherhood that engages the urgent need for women’s rights across the globe? Is there a useable past in the history of Mother’s Day, worth reviving in the present?


To my rhetorical questions, I am learning to declare “Yes!” And the answers begin with Julia Ward Howe, famous for penning *The Battle Hymn of the Republic* during the dawning days of the Civil War yet little known for composing *An Appeal to Womanhood Throughout the World* in the wake of the Franco-Prussian War. It was this document that inaugurated her call for an International Women’s Congress and included these words:

“Arise, all women who have hearts, whether your baptism be that of water or of tears! Say firmly: ‘We will not have great questions decided by irrelevant agencies. Our husbands shall not come to us, reeking with carnage, for caresses and applause. Our sons shall not be taken from us to unlearn all that we have been able to teach them of charity, mercy and patience. We, women of one country, will be too tender of those of another country, to all our sons to be trained to injure theirs.’”

From 1872 on, Howe worked for women’s suffrage and celebrated Mother’s Day with friends each year—a day, according to her daughters, “devoted to the advocacy of peace doctrines.” For Howe, Mother’s

Day was an invitation to action and advocacy, peace and justice—a day for “Mother Power.”

So: what might it mean to celebrate this Mother’s Day with its original spirit in mind? What if we invited our children and loved ones to honor us by spending any money that may have gone to gifts on behalf of poor women and families in our country and across the globe? What if we told our children the story of Julia Ward Howe? And what if we used this day, in church and community, to preach and teach the gospel that Coretta Scott King knew so well? This is sounding like “Mother Power” to me...

“God of all creation, pour out your blessing on all mothers and those who provide motherly care. You have made them in your image and given them children to love and care for in your name. Bless them with a heart like your heart: loving and kind, comforting and strong, nurturing and grace-filled... As they model your mercy, help them extend the forgiveness they themselves freely receive from you. In all circumstances fortify their faith, that they may love you above all. We ask this in Jesus’ name. Amen.” (Sundays and Seasons, Augsburg Fortress) 

The Rev. Elyse Nelson Winger, an ELCA pastor, serves as university chaplain at Illinois Wesleyan University in Bloomington, Ill. She and husband, Stewart, have two children, Catherine and Daniel, who are in the delightful elementary-school years.

c l o s e e n c o u n t e r s o f t h e
ANGELIC KIND

by Marguerite M. Rourk



*In dark of night, or yet in days beset with fright,
thy gracious loving hand, O Lord, sustains;
for thou dost give thine angels charge,
who, in their silent, tireless care,
surround with their protecting arms
thy children frail who wander paths unknown.*

—“I Walk with Angels,” anthem
by James Engels

Ah, those ubiquitous flying spirit beings. Who or what are angels? Let us be careful here, for seized by angel mania, we have managed to trivialize and reduce them to something more like benign fairies than the mighty beings who do the Creator’s bidding.

We have portrayed them via clothes, jewelry, tattoos, ornaments, candles, garden statues, books, more books, cartoons, pillows, table and kitchen linens, license tags, bumper stickers, notepads, soap (really), lampshades, wallpaper, towel holders, flags, fiction, fantasy, key chains, screen savers, sports team names, and, of course, pop songs. Granted, not all portrayals of angels are such egregious misuses; frescoes, icons, baptismal fonts, stained-glass windows and such generally do them justice. We name churches and institutions for them, as in St. Gabriel or St. Michael and All Angels, which is fine indeed.

Human beings, however, often miss the mark concerning angels. To quote St. Paul, “What then shall we say to this?” Adjustments to attitude and perspective are in order here: Scripture tells us that angels are single-minded bossy sky-cleavers, obedient heavenly workers who show up on the job as solo pop-ins, small groups or a numberless host, are always far behind rushing fools, and eternally on call. To us they are time travelers, extra-terrestrials (ETs) created by God, face to face with God, commanded and dispatched by God, “heard on high,” “from the realms of glory,” “Hark!

The Herald,” and absolute dazzlers who are forever saying “Don’t be afraid.”

Powerful and mysterious, angels come and go from the Holy Presence as they do the holy bidding. Despite our misconceptions, angels are integral to both testaments from their first appearance in Genesis to their final mention in Revelation. They are essential to the Bible, part of “the unique record of God’s dealings with people over the ages” (as described in the NRSV translators’ preface).

Hebrew scriptures were not the first sacred lore to mention these beings who carried the messages of the deity/deities in vogue with humans in various times and places. Hebrew scriptures were, however, the first to describe angels as created by the Divine to convey to us the message that Divine will actually was *to live in relationship with mortals*.

Angels show up quickly in Hebrew scriptures: by the end of Genesis 3 cherubim are positioned at Eden’s gate, along with that “sword flaming and turning to guard the way to the tree of life” (Genesis 3:24). Old Testament angelic appearances teach us that a great truth is being imparted to all humankind, though the message might be delivered to a single recipient. A scriptural *Heads Up!* for us, every angelic message is meant for all people whether they are aware of that or not. The Genesis message of “*disobedience = displacement*” is for everyone: Therefore, our desire to do things our way is the very definition of sin. To this day, being ousted from the Garden has never discouraged humankind from endeavoring to do things our way.

The Holy One, however, is the Last Word in never giving up, so angels have the same old job description: convey God’s message to human beings. Squabbling, selfish, irritating lot that we are, we are still and forever God’s beloved and treasured children. How’s that for foolish consistency on God’s part? Well, that’s the way the Maker “of all that is, seen and unseen” (Nicene Creed) wants it, so that’s the way it is. Amen.

Angelic work

Sometimes people ask about guardian angels, but, no, I don't think each person has an assigned guardian angel. What angel would want that gig, given our tendency of making bad choices? Please. What I do most fervently believe is that angels assist and perhaps even "guard" us at times. As to what times, it is not given to mortals to know angelic schedules, yet many credible people have testified that angelic intervention was the only explanation for their protection or rescue in dangerous circumstances.

In *The Hiding Place*, Corrie ten Boom recounts risking swift and severe punishment by concealing a Bible in her dress at the Ravensbruck concentration camp. Utterly unnoticed by the guard who was searching the women, Corrie knew that an angel must have blocked her from the guard's sight, and she continued sharing pages of Scripture with her prison sisters.

In Acts 12, as he slept in prison chains, Peter thought he was dreaming when "an angel of the Lord" woke him, loosed his shackles, led him past sleeping guards, thought-opened the locked city gate, and then vanished. Realizing the truth, Peter told other believers, "Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me..." (Acts 12:11).

The concept of personal "guardian angels" did not emerge until later in the Christian era and is nowhere in Hebrew scriptures, yet the story of Balaam's ass could make a convincing case (Numbers 22–25). Intent on his own course of travel and action, an angry Balaam beat his donkey when the animal wandered off the path. Angelic intervention saved the day—the ass, Balaam, and God's plan for Israel—by showing Balaam that to go against God's will was to go toward a seriously awful end. One of the great angelic encounters in Hebrew scripture, this story is about stubborn human stupidity colliding head on with God over Who is in charge of whom and what, all through the action of an angel dispatched as instructor and enforcer.

Balaam's tale always brings to my mind an ancient rabbinic adage: *When thou swellest with pride in thyself, O mortal, remember that the Holy One created the gnat before thee*. This saying is particularly applicable to our human condition, given that often it has taken an angelic multitude to impart to us a relatively simple message: *God is God, and we are not*. Perhaps that is why, in divine wisdom, the Maker created angels before trying the holy hand at forming the likes of us. We *need* angels.

Angelic messages

Surely we have angelic encounters in our lives, yet remain unaware of them; neither do we know what forms angels take when among us. God is not bound by time or any other human standard.

Centuries of promises, judges, prophets, laws, exiles, covenants, deliverance, and kings were not sufficient to keep us faithful and in right relationship with God. Angels were called in to work again, as God had the best idea ever: to come *to* us as one *of* us, to be God-with-us so we could be us-with-God forever. Now this process had never been vetted, and looked like a fairly cockamamie plan from the outset. But it was again time for holy truth to be delivered, and Gabriel got his marching orders. I hope he got overtime for this, as he nearly worked his wings off delivering messages to Zechariah, then Mary, Joseph, Joseph again, then shepherds, Magi, and Joseph again. And again.

"Don't be afraid," said the angel. Do they say that because of how they look to us humans? Did Gabriel appear to faithful old Zechariah in human form or as a shimmering presence? Did Zechariah have a vision, or was he seized by the holiness of place and moment, hearing the message in his head and heart? Had he inhaled too much of that temple incense? Dr. Luke, the gospel writer, is unequivocal: An angel, great Gabriel no less, appeared in that temple sacristy and conveyed God's truth that God alone is the life giver. Zechariah and his beloved Elizabeth, her childbearing years a

distant memory, would have a son whose name would be John, "God is gracious," and he would "prepare the way of the Lord" as forth told by Isaiah.

Gabriel's message to Mary was much the same, albeit with a significant twist: if she consented to the holy will, she also would conceive a son as the Holy Spirit overshadowed her. Her baby would be The One so longed for, Israel's Messiah; his name would be Jesus, "savior of the people," and his kingdom would have no end.

Once more Gabriel spoke God's truth to humankind: God is the life giver, for it was not yet "after the manner of women" with Mary because she was so very young. The angel's crowning words were to Mary, to us, and to the whole world: "Nothing will be impossible with God" (Luke 1:37).

Angelic Purpose

We don't know what angels looked like. Genesis describes Abraham's visitors variously as three men, as the "angel of the Lord," and as God speaking directly to Abraham. But the message was the same: divine truth was given to mortals, for the good of all. For two millennia angels have related the miracle of the God who spoke to mortals, and then, becoming fully human, came to live among us.

Might angels have appeared as bright light or perhaps as apparitions beautiful yet unearthly? Some biblical scholars say that the great star appearing over Bethlehem was not an astronomical star but the convergence of the angelic host. So unimaginably brilliant would have been their manifestation in the heavens that Eastern sages, sky-gazers, star-studiers, were willing to leave home, families and work. The Magi knew well the signs that for eons had appeared regularly in the heavens, yet they rode westward toward who-knew-what in order to follow that light.

Angels in the Bible are sent by the God who loved them and made them in order to impart to us God's

truths. Those truths comfort, strengthen and protect us, tethering us to the holy heart, right where the Holy One most dearly desires for us to live. Angels keep us grounded in the gospel that in the person of Jesus Christ God has entered our world simply because God *loves* this world.

Moving at thought and will, angels' purpose and work is the praise of God. These wondrous messengers hold heaven and earth in a single peace, helping us to praise by keeping God's truths before the eyes in our heads and the eyes of our hearts. Angels assist us to remember and rejoice that the Holy One has set us apart for this life and the next. Angels lift us up to see beyond our human limitations so that by grace we might envision all that we can be in this precious life, and who we shall be when we are complete in the life to come.

While some find comfort in imagining that we become angels when we die, Scripture is clear that we don't. What we become is more perfectly who we were created to be—God's children, who through our Lord Jesus Christ, will live forever to praise and glorify the creating Father, saving Son, and empowering Spirit.

Angels announced our Lord's conception, heralded his birth, attended him in his temptation, ministered to him in his passion, proclaimed his resurrection, and danced for joy at his ascension. They do no less for us.

I walk with angels all the way, they shield me and defend me.

All Satan's power is held at bay when heavenly hosts attend me.


They are a sure defense, all fear and sorrow hence, unharmed by foes, do what they may; I walk with angels all the way.

—"I Walk with Angels," Engels 🌿

The Rev. Dr. Marguerite M. Rourk, pastor of Christ Evangelical Lutheran Church, Fairfax, Va., shares her life with husband, David, and sons, Edwin of Portland, Ore., and Matthew of Asheville, N.C., with The Incomparable Grandson Tiernan, and with two cats and two ferrets. The ferrets are still in charge.

Mothering, Mentoring, **AND** Mercy

by Nancy Goldberger



4 + 4 + 10 - 2 = 18 + 8 = 16
2 + 4 + 5 - 1 = 10 + 4 = 14
10 + 2 - 5 - 2 =

"Don't be alarmed," he said. "You are looking for Jesus the Nazarene, who was crucified. He has risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid him. But go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (Mark 16:6–7 NIV)

Do you remember your first day in a new school or at a new job? Perhaps you woke up early, excited at the prospect of the new venture. Do you also remember feeling some uncertainty or confusion? Maybe you wondered: How will I figure out how things are done here? How will I navigate through this place and time?

The choices we face in life can be fraught with uncertainty. It is a gift to have someone help you find your way. Often we call these people mentors, someone who leads or guides.

Mentors can come into our lives at any time. Sometimes we meet a mentor at work; other times a mentor can be someone who is familiar to us. Mentoring—leading or guiding—is a vital and rewarding experience for both giver and receiver.

Mentoring angels?

In the theme verse of this issue (Mark 16:6), Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome were in a new situation. The Sabbath was over and they were on their way to anoint the crucified body of Jesus as it lay wrapped in a tomb.

These three women, following the customs of the time, were going to pay respect to the body of their dear Savior and friend. Imagine their shock when they discovered that the massive stone was rolled away from tomb opening. Upon entering, they are greeted by "a young man dressed in a white robe, sitting on the right side" (Mark 16:5). The verse says they were "alarmed." Startled and confused might be other ways to describe what they felt. Their loved one, who they watched die on the cross and who had been buried in this tomb, was not where they expected. If ever there was uncharted territory, they were in it. But the story does not end here.

This young man, who we believe to be an angel, helps them understand what they must do. The angel says, "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee; there you will see him, just as he told you" (Mark 16:6–7).

Upon hearing this, the women hurried away, afraid, yet filled with joy (Matthew 28). They ran and told the disciples what they had seen and heard. Imagine being in their shoes. If the angel had not shared these words, the outcome might have been different. The words from the angel—someone who could share information that moved the women from bewildered amazement to action—gave the women at the tomb the direction they needed to go and tell the good news of Jesus' victory over sin and death. Their action was so important that we still talk about it today.

Merciful mentors

Have you had mentors in your life? I know I have benefited from the caring tutelage of several mentors over the years. Aside from my own mother, a remarkable model of love, courage, and fortitude, my first mentor was my sister Kathy. We were two of seven children in a pastor's family. Although she was 10 years older than me, Kathy and I shared a special bond. When all the others had left home to live their own lives, she made the conscious decision to commute to college for the first two years so I would have a sibling at home. I adored her for it. I got up early in the morning to make us identical sack lunches before she left for classes. I waited up for her to come home at night so we could talk about our days.

I knew her sacrifice—long hours, a significant commute, and spending time away from what most 19-year-olds crave (independence)—was made with me

in mind. By committing that two-year period to me, she was present as I traversed what we now call the 'tween years. I did not have the words for it then, but I have always known it was a gift I will never forget.

Some 16 years later, when I was an elementary school teacher, a junior high English teacher befriended me. A well-seasoned educator, Mary took me under her wing and gently encouraged me to explore ideas that stretched my vision of my future. I loved the students in my classes, and I was a good teacher, but at times I felt I was living someone else's idea of my life. My passion did not live in this role. At age 26, I began to realize I was going through the motions of life instead of living it fully.

When Mary stepped into the role of dean at a local college, she championed a program for the community at-large. The program allowed community members to take college classes at no expense if seats were available after registration had closed.

Mary invited me to have lunch one day. As we talked, she let me know about the new program. She planted a seed that quickly took root. I signed up for a marketing class. I told myself that if I could get an A in this class—with subject matter unlike anything I had studied up to that point—I would actively pursue some of those dreams I had tucked away. I passed the class with flying colors. With new-found confidence, I had the courage to take the first of several life-altering steps. If Mary had not spent the time and effort to help me, I may have never taken those first steps to discover myself.

Mothering and mentoring

As a mother, I try to lead and guide my daughter. The foundational seeds I believe are important for her life have been planted and are nurtured. However, I know that she will need others to help as she fully matures. She will need the ears, hearts, and voices of others at different times in her life to help guide her to her fullest, boldest self. I know that no matter how much a mother

loves her children, it takes a village to raise them. My daughter is fortunate; there is a circle of people who love her. I that she has people just as wise and giving in her life as Kathy and Mary were in mine.

Having the time and opportunity to be present for someone, to serve as a mentor, is rewarding. I am purposeful about supporting programs and activities where I can positively impact young women. I coach in a youth soccer program, helping to build young girl's athletic skills and their self-confidence. It is amazing what a few encouraging words can do and how critical this affirmation of self is to them. For some it will be the first time someone has looked them in the eye and said, "You can do this. I believe in you."

Women of the ELCA Katie's Fund gives us the opportunity to extend that mentoring reach to many young women we may never meet. Supported by our gifts, this fund (see opposite page for more information) was established by women for women. One of the purposes of the fund is to foster leadership development. In the past, it has provided assistance to send young women to triennial gatherings where they can experience what it's like to gain training in advocacy and find their own passions for leadership.

Aside from leadership development, Katie's Fund also supports global sharing and living theology. When you support Katie's Fund, you help Women of the ELCA help women hear the message we know they need: We know you can do this. We believe in you.

Rarely do we see angels in gleaming robes waiting to tell us what we need to do. Our angels come in the form of the Kathys and Marys in our life, calling out the best in us so we can reach our full potential. When we have the opportunity to return that favor, angels are certainly smiling upon us and saying: I believe in you. You can do this. 🌿

Nancy Goldberger, former editor of *Lutheran Woman Today* magazine (now *Gather*), thanks all the mentors in her life, past, present, and future.

There's a little bit of Katie in all of us.

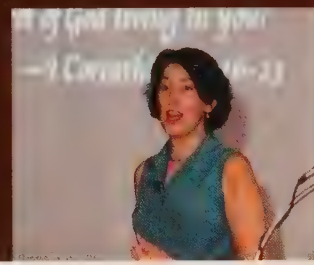
Katharina von Bora Luther was a practical and bold woman of faith. She was also the dedicated partner of her husband, Martin. The example she set as a wife and mother, farmer, entrepreneur, leader, and caregiver continues to inspire us today.

Through Katie's Fund, Women of the ELCA honors her life by developing leaders, bridging cultures, and nurturing faith.



Katharina von Bora Luther

Won't you help continue Katie's legacy? Support Katie's Fund!



Make a difference today by directing your gift to "Katie's Fund endowment" or "Katie's Fund current" to meet immediate needs. Give online or send to:

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HEALTH WISE

Lost for Words

by Molly M. Ginty

Standing in front of her

first-grade classmates when she was just six years old, Sarah D'Agostino tried to give a show-and-tell presentation—and stumbled and stalled through her speech.

“From that day forward, I suffered from a chronic stuttering problem,” says D'Agostino, now 36 and a mother of two in Novi, Mich. “It affected every aspect of my life.”

Ten years of speech therapy and loving support from her family did little to eradicate D'Agostino's problem. She was teased by classmates, mortified by social situations, and on the brink of suicide when, at age 21, she met a communications professor who also stuttered and who offered her help and mentoring that turned her life around.

D'Agostino learned to control her stuttering so well that she was able to sail through the rest of college, socialize with ease, find steady work, and fall in love with her husband, a landscaper who doesn't stutter—but who proposed to her while he was escorting her to a stuttering awareness conference.

Today, D'Agostino and her husband, Freddie, have two daughters. And their youngest, 3-year-old Eva, stuttered for two months last year—and could very well start up again. “As the family programs administrator for the National Stuttering Association, I know Eva is at the age when this can first manifest,” says Sarah. “I'm feeling a roller coaster of emotions about that. But I'm confident that what I've learned from my own experience will make her road much easier.”

Stuttering has seized the spotlight since the 2010 release of “The King's Speech,” an award-winning film that chronicles how England's King George VI overcame his all-too-public stuttering problem. Though stuttering affects just 1 percent of the population (roughly 3 million Americans), this disorder can be socially, financially, and emotionally devastating, making it difficult to win friends or land a job, and boosting a sufferer's risk of depression and suicide. Part of the problem is that few people realize this is not a voluntary quirk, but is instead an involuntary medical condition. As the United States prepares to mark National Stuttering Awareness Week (May 7–13) here's the truth about this disorder—and how treatment and new scientific breakthroughs are offering hope to those affected by it.

Stuttering, also called stammering, is a condition that makes people repeat or prolong their words, interrupting their flow of speech. It strikes most often when people are tired, excited, or stressed, and is associated with characteristic body movements: rapid eye blinks, tremors in the lips and jaw, and tension in the face and upper body. Stuttering is four times more likely to affect males than females, and usually appears between the ages of two and four, when many children go through a period of stumbling over their words that is a natural part of their development. But that becomes a problem if it persists for more than six months or affects a child's schoolwork or social interactions. Stuttering can also

This ongoing column is part of the Women of the ELCA health initiative, Raising Up Healthy Women and Girls. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org for more information.

strike later in life, after a stroke, trauma, or brain injury.

Stuttering is linked to genetic mutations and can thus run in families. Some 60 percent of people who stammer have relatives who do so. "In some cases, there appears to be a genetic metabolic disorder that is associated with speech problems," says Gerald Maguire, Ph.D., a stuttering researcher at the University of California at Irvine. "In other cases, genetic mutations have been linked to irregular levels of dopamine, a neurotransmitter that creates sensations of well-being and also plays a significant role in muscle movement."

As scientists piece together the brain chemistry of stuttering, those affected by the condition are anxiously awaiting more news. "There is much for researchers to learn about stuttering so that we can better understand its causes and develop more effective methods of treatment and therapy and a potential cure," says Stephanie Coppen of Atlanta, whose son Cameron, 11, has stuttered since he was four.

After discovering that stuttering is linked to brain chemistry, scientists determined that the drugs asenapine, olanzapine, and risperidone—which all affect neurons in the brain—are clinically effective in treating it.

Decades of study show that stuttering can also be overcome through other interventions:

controlled fluency therapy that makes you slow down and notice when you're stuttering;

auditory feedback that makes it sound like you're talking in unison with someone else;

breathing exercises that slow down speech and induce calm in stressful situations; and

cognitive behavioral therapy to help change thinking patterns that make stuttering worse.

"Social support is also very important," says Tammy Flores, executive director of the National Stuttering Association, which runs counseling groups for people who stutter across the United States.

With treatment, full recovery can be possible, as proven by the cases of several famous former stutterers: singer Carly Simon, actor James Earl Jones, actresses Nicole Kidman and Marilyn Monroe, and politician and orator Winston Churchill.

If you meet people who stutter, what's the best way to communicate? Experts say you should maintain eye contact; listen to what is being said, not how it is being said; slow down your own speech; and never try to finish their sentences, which will force them to start all over again (and frustrate you both) if you make the wrong assumption about what they intend to say.

"By working to communicate effectively with those who stutter, you can help them overcome awkwardness and break habitual patterns," says D'Agostino. "This will help them move in a more positive direction with their condition, whether it eventually resolves itself or whether it persists." 🌿

Molly M. Ginty (<http://mollymaureenginty.wordpress.com>) lives in New York City. Her work has appeared in *Women's eNews*, *Marie Claire*, *Redbook*, and *Ms*.

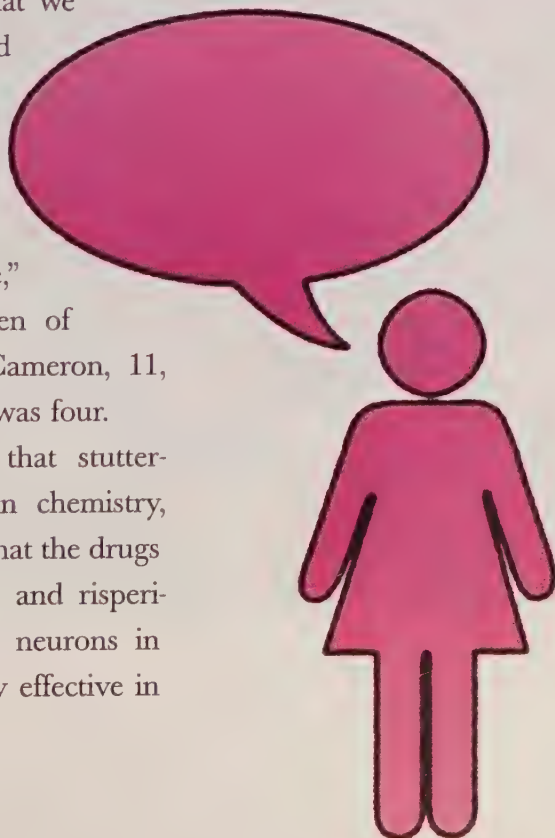
For more information:

National Stuttering Association

www.nsastutter.org

Stuttering Foundation of America

www.stutteringhelp.org



go and TELL

by JIMMY K. FRODO



WHenever I take the train from my house to downtown Chicago I exit at the Washington stop on State Street. And every time, rain or shine, I run into a middle-aged man preaching on the street corner. He has an amplifier and a microphone and quite a number of pamphlets about getting to know Jesus as your Lord and Savior. I usually shake my head at the offered pamphlet, walk on by, and wonder: What keeps this preacher out here on the sidewalk day in and day out? I can't imagine the people rushing by are all that receptive to his message since their hands are full of shopping bags.

When I was in college, I remember accompanying a spiritually ambivalent friend of mine to a movie. Rushing from the car to the theater, we were stopped by two wholesome and fresh-faced young men. "If you die tonight, where are you going to go?" they asked us. I recall mumbling something as we rushed by. In the dark of the theatre, my friend leaned over and asked me, "Is that what your faith is all about?" I knew that I couldn't say "yes," but I wasn't sure I could say "absolutely not" either.

Evangelism. It can be a dirty word for those of us that associate it with street preachers yelling about eternal damnation and people shoving pamphlets about an angry God at us.

Claiming our identity as evangelists can bring on fear and anxiety, making us stay

silent, lest friends or family think we are just like "those people."

But telling the story of our faith isn't optional. Jesus doesn't tell those who recognize him on that Easter morning that, if it is convenient, they might consider telling the good news to the people they see. Jesus doesn't give them an out, he gives them a command: Go and tell. The women who first witnessed the resurrection at the tomb and the disciples they told were as full of fear as any of us, not sure exactly how to go about it, and sometimes, even chose just to keep their mouths shut. And yet, the story of our faith has spread far beyond those early borders, through the work of followers of this Risen Savior.

Evangelism is storytelling

Our lives are made up of stories. We tell stories because they illuminate our life stages: childhood mistakes and joys, falling in love, raising children, taking risks, making important decisions, all of these events form a narrative that tells us who we are. There are few stories in my family that have been passed down for generations. Some of them are probably not even close to the truth anymore, but people who are a part of my family know the stories. My grandfather, a pastor in the rural Midwest, was once paid with live chickens. My father sold honey out of a little red wagon as a child. My mother

and uncle nearly drowned after making a raft and setting out on a river near the family farm. Without these stories, we wouldn't be the family that we are.

Evangelism is storytelling. Our story is God's story, beginning when creation was brought to birth, unfolding in miraculous and mysterious ways, following a desert people, all the way to a baby born in a stable in Bethlehem—a baby that would change everything. These stories are the story of our family—a people bound to one another and all of God's people through time.

Evangelism is nothing more than telling that story and letting God's story speak for itself. The good news doesn't need to be added to or enhanced, what God has done is good enough. But telling these stories means knowing these stories, as deeply as we know our own family stories.

Our fear of evangelism decreases as we become more comfortable with the story of our faith. Joining a Bible study, committing to read Scripture daily, and attending worship are all concrete ways to get comfortable with the story of God's family.

Evangelism is joy

Every so often, I will ask our church council to rate themselves on a scale of 1–10 regarding their comfort talking about Jesus. I have heard everything from negative numbers to a few sheepish 5s. Talking about faith is scary business, because it touches places of deep belief and vulnerability within ourselves. The command of Jesus to go and tell sounds uncomfortable at best and downright frightening at worst.

Deciding that we are evangelists, messengers, and storytellers, doesn't mean that we are going to be pushing pamphlets or yelling in microphones.

Evangelism doesn't have to be a word to strike fear into the heart; it can be a word that fills us with great

and abiding joy. But how? We have to recognize that in the command of Jesus is the belief that we are worthy to tell this story. Bumbling, scared, confused, and overwhelmed disciples that we are, we join a company of folks that have been stumbling their way through telling God's story for a very long time. And God chooses us over and over, no matter how good (or not) we are

at telling it. Jesus doesn't show any fear in investing this great responsibility in the disciples or in us. The fear is not God's, it is ours, and that means God gives us the gifts to tell the story as it needs to be told.

THE STORY OF GOD IS DEEP ENOUGH TO HOLD BOTH JOY AND TRAGEDY.

Knowing that the One who rose from the tomb, who set the stars in the heavens, and continues to be present with us even now, has chosen us to speak words of grace to a world that desperately needs to hear such a message ought to fill us with joy!

Evangelism is seeing reality

Part of the reason evangelism is hard is because telling this story only works if we are willing to confront the reality of the world around us. Our story is not all wine and roses, it involves struggle, pain, confusion, and even death. Evangelism, then, does not ignore the brokenness of the world, but sticks it out in the midst of it. The story of God is easy to tell when the sun is shining, the birds are singing, and everything feels right. It is harder to tell when we see wars around us, get news of cancer and death, and face tragedies that we never saw coming. So we tell a story of a God who is right there in the midst of all the broken pieces—not a fairytale.

As those women came to the empty tomb that Easter morning, they came not expecting to find a risen savior. They carried with them the spices to anoint a dead body. Easter morning is the celebration of life only because we know that Good Friday was not just

an act, but a true event. Evangelism is not about denying the questions, the difficulties, and the doubts that come with this life—it is about seeing reality for what it is and knowing that the story of God is deep enough to hold both joy and tragedy.

Evangelism is connection

Believing that evangelism is, at the core, storytelling, we can recognize that evangelism is also about connection. We tell the story of God because the story of God matters. We tell the story of God because it truly is good news, news that has the ability to change lives. Love, redemption, mercy, and grace are not just minor ideas; they can pull us out of the depths of despair and connect us with a God who is all goodness.

Evangelism is not just formed through a connection with God—it requires a connection with God's people. We share the good news because all of creation needs to hear it. The story of God is a story of deep and abiding love, and evangelism can only work if we truly love those with whom we share this news. God loves God's people, so we also must love God's people, as broken as they can be.

God refuses to abandon God's people, even when they do all manner of things to break their relationship with God. Since the beginning of time we have seen that even the faithful get themselves twisted and lost in their relationship with God, and, yet, God's connection to them never wavers. In telling God's story, we, too, attempt to reflect that unwavering love for those with whom we share this news. Loving God's people is the rich soil from which the good news can grow!

Evangelism isn't about *you*

Talking about faith gets scary when we start to believe that it all hangs on us. While in college, I remember sitting through a meeting of a campus group that was deeply concerned about the salvation of my fellow students. Getting students to accept Jesus into their heart

was of utmost importance, lest we lose them for all eternity. Having the right words meant salvation. But, the focus was all wrong. Telling God's story isn't about us at all, it is about God.

We have a God who rose from the dead, who changed everything we are on that Easter morning. We read in Mark's Gospel that the women left that place seized with terror and amazement. They did not have any words to explain what they had seen, so they told no one. They were afraid, and fear kept them bound.

But, somehow, word got out. The resurrection was just too big to keep a secret. The good news was told not because the women figured things out, but because God's story is just so amazing that even fear cannot keep the story from spreading.

God's great plan, from the very beginning, has been to flood this world with grace, mercy and love. We are invited to be a part of the living and the telling of this plan! But this plan does not hang on us, our abilities, our words, or our actions. This plan is rooted in the heart of God, and when this world comes to an end, we are promised that every knee shall bow in honor and praise to God.

At that tomb on Easter morning everything changed. The miracle of life triumphed over death. God's story took one more turn, a turn that even those closest to Jesus never saw coming.

Throughout the Gospel of Mark, from the beginning to the end, Jesus encounters regular folks like you and me. His presence fills them with courage to do more than they ever thought possible. We, like those early disciples, have been witness to the goodness of God, and we have been chosen to share it! God's story is our family story, and it is a story that we need not fear to tell.

May you, as this season unfolds, find the courage and the love to tell this family story without fear. 🌿

The Rev. Brooke Petersen serves as pastor at Irving Park Lutheran Church, Chicago, Ill.



LET US PRAY

Healing Oil, Sheltering Comfort

by Julie K. Aageson

Help us, O God, to be

healing oil and sheltering comfort for all those in darkness and despair.

Bear with me in this anticipatory and promise-filled month on the cusp of summer. As I write in mid-winter, the hope of May is somehow elusive: too much darkness, too much suffering.

For weeks now, we've heard daily reports about sexual abuse and the shattered lives of victims whose existence has been turned upside down by people they knew and trusted. In the community where I live, 1,300 employees of a large company are in the sixth month of a forced lock-out with little hope of a just resolution. This afternoon, I'll visit a friend preparing for more radiation as cancerous tumors continue to invade her body.

I know these to be old stories, repeated again and again in every time and place—deep betrayals of trust, respect, and dignity that undermine life and health. Trying to sort out where a life-giving God is in the midst of such suffering is no small thing. In our privileged culture and way of life, we've come to expect grace, hope, joy, forgiveness. But when the light is snuffed out and darkness prevails, then what?

Grace, hope, joy, forgiveness. These are signposts of Christian life. Together, they form the lens through which many of us “read” daily life. They are part of the air we breathe and the way we look at the world. When a community is torn apart by revelations of abuse or when a successful company makes huge profits while refusing to treat its employees

fairly or when trust within a family is shattered beyond repair, what then of grace, hope, joy, forgiveness?

The Gospel of Mark contains story after story about Jesus' life and death. The entire gospel is earth-shaking, life-changing. It's a vivid recounting of the ways Jesus brought life out of death. At the close of the gospel, we are left to sort out the meaning of Jesus' life. What is salvation? What does it mean that to live is to die? What is being a servant about? Why is there so much darkness? What are we to tell? How are we to live?

This is what I make of it: again and again, the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus reveal the truth of God. The truth of God is grace, hope, joy, forgiveness. Jesus' servant life—his emptying of himself—shows us how to walk with one another in suffering. Bringing life out of death is the truth of Jesus' life. Bringing life out of death is the truth of God.

We too are invited to bring life out of death by becoming healing oil and sheltering comfort to those in darkness and despair. It's an invitation we claim for ourselves as well as the hurting world all around us. And it's the only way to experience grace, hope, joy, forgiveness.

Holy God, Eternal spirit, Earth-maker, Pain-bearer, Life-giver, help us bring life out of death. Help us, O God, to be healing oil and sheltering comfort for all those in darkness and despair. Amen. 🌿

Julie K. Aageson is coordinator of ELCA Resource Centers and director of the Resource Center for the Eastern North Dakota Synod. She is a member of Bethesda Lutheran Church in Moorhead, Minn.



WE RECOMMEND

Resources for action, advocacy, programs, or further study

Compiled from sources including the ELCA News Service, Seeds for the Parish, and www.elca.org

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Check out the new ELCA e-store at <http://resources.elca.org>. Here you can easily find and order resources for yourself, your congregation and your women's group. The one-stop shop offers the convenience of searching for items by category, such as evangelism, disaster response, faith and spirituality, social issues, stewardship, and much more.

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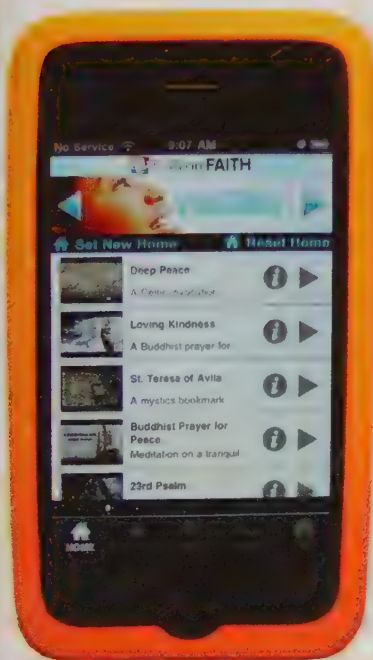
Free Pentecost resource online

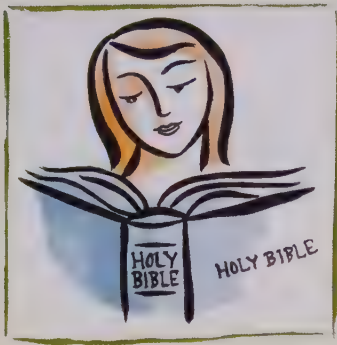
And if you're looking for a free resource on Pentecost (after reading Gail Ramshaw's article on page 34), look no further than Women of the ELCA's website. The free, downloadable four-page resource, "Pentecost, Prayer and Power" connects the disciples' experience at Pentecost and the days leading up to it. The resource explores three areas in which we can be a blessing to others through prayer and action: women's health, violence against women and clearing the red tape that keeps people from being fully empowered. Visit www.womenoftheelca.org and click on "Program resources for your women's group."

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To see if there is a resource center near you, visit www.elca.org/resource centers.





BIBLE STUDY

GO AND TELL

by Patricia Lull

Theme Verse

"Do not be alarmed; you are looking for Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has been raised; he is not here."

Mark 16:6

Opening Hymn

"I Know That My Redeemer Lives!"
verses 1, 2 and 7 (*Evangelical Lutheran Worship* 619)

Prayer

Almighty God, you bless us with the word of life. As we turn to the study of the Scripture, open our minds to understand your ways. Give us the courage to live out what we learn today. We pray, trusting that the Father, Son, and Spirit will guide us in our time together. Amen.

Introduction to Mark 16:1–20

As a young pastor, I began to see that both the church and the wider culture prepare for and celebrate the Christmas holidays but only the church really prepares to celebrate Easter as a "holy day."

In the congregations I served over the years, as in yours, Holy Week services follow on the heels of mid-week Lenten services. Maundy Thursday leads into Good Friday, in many places followed by the Easter Vigil, lasting late into Saturday evening. This is a packed week for those of us who follow Christ's passion all the

way to the end. Watching and waiting annually for the first cry of Christ's resurrection is as exhilarating as it is exhausting.

Despite all the services and the many parish activities that surround them, over the years I have loved nothing more than being the first to arrive at the church on Easter morning. It feels the way I imagined the women must have felt in Mark's Gospel, coming to the tomb as early as they dared as the first slivers of dawn broke apart the night.

I still remember one Easter, walking from the parking lot behind the church building around to the front door with my key in hand, as the sounds of the birds greeted me before daylight on a brisk Appalachian morning. It was springtime, and the hillsides of southern Ohio were lush with dogwood, forsythia, and redbud. At that hour, I had passed no cars on my drive to church, and there wasn't a single sign that anyone else was stirring in the houses along the street. And yet, as I opened the door I knew that someone had beaten me to the church. No matter how well I had planned ahead or risen in the dark of

night, entering the building that Easter morning I was flooded with the recognition that someone had gotten there ahead of me.

It was Jesus. The first cry of the resurrection is God's assurance to us that in life and in death, Jesus Christ goes before us into all places and circumstances. Easter means that we are never the first to arrive.

We have come to the final chapter in the Gospel of Mark. We are at the end of the narrative that commenced with this bold announcement: "The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God." (Mark 1:1). Having met Jesus of Nazareth at the Jordan River where John was baptizing, we have followed him throughout his public ministry in Galilee. We have witnessed his calling of disciples, his healing and teaching, his silencing of troubling spirits, and his compassionate regard for outcasts and the poor.

We have trailed along on storm-tossed seas with Jesus, sat with others on the grassy hillsides where multitudes were fed, and walked the roads that led eventually to Jerusalem. Along the way, we have seen his identity unfold and finally be clarified—that he is Jesus, the crucified, the Son of God.

Now, in these closing verses we hear the testimony that he is not dead but lives. Jesus has been raised by God from the dead and he is going on before the disciples into Galilee. Jesus first met his followers there and will meet them there again, and from Galilee he will lead them into the farthest reaches of the world. The story is almost complete.

In another sense, however, we have come to an ending that is not quite the ending we might anticipate after Mark's crisp and detailed narrative of Jesus' final days in Jerusalem. Here, the details are fuzzy and less resolved.

Early on, careful readers of this Gospel noted the abrupt ending. In some ancient manuscripts the whole Gospel ends at 16:8a, with the fleeing women silent and fearful. Other manuscripts include the verses we now

read, including 16b (the last half of verse 16) and 16:9-20, though they may be set aside by brackets or placed in footnotes in your Bible.

It is important to remember that Mark did not dream up this narrative. He worked from oral accounts and testimonies to craft a single narrative account. Writing a text by drawing together a variety of important sources was familiar technique in ancient times. Most contemporary scholars conclude that Mark's handiwork stops at 16:8 and that the remaining verses were added by other early Christians.

Wherever you choose to place the final syllable on this story, know that the entire Gospel of Mark, from 1:1 to 16:20 was received as part of the canon, or authoritative text, by the end of the second century. The final verses may have come from a second compiler, but they are part of the Gospel narrative nonetheless. They complete the story we have followed through these nine sessions.

Going Ahead of You

READ MARK 16:1-8.

1. Which features of this account are the easiest for you to picture in your own imagination? Which details do you find the most puzzling?

We have already met these women in verse 15:40 and 15:47. By Mark's account, the same women carry the story forward. On that first day of the week, they come early to the burial site. Telling the rest of the story now rests on their shoulders. Yet they have not come to be witnesses to a new thing. They arrive prepared only to complete the custom of anointing the body, an action that would have been done on the day of Jesus' death had time allowed.

Mark includes a lovely detail, describing that they bought spices and came to the tomb. In the dizzying whirlwind of those last days, they had not anticipated

this need. On Friday the reality of Jesus’ death became clear, but by then they needed to wait until after the Sabbath to make this purchase. This will not be the last surprise for these women.

You’ll recall that they had been there, at the edge of the scene, as Joseph of Arimathea wrapped Jesus’ dead body in a linen cloth, placed the body in the cave-like tomb, and secured it with a large stone.

In the disorienting spin of grief, the women have remembered they need spices but did not think to bring along someone strong enough to move the stone away from the tomb’s opening.

What a needless worry that proves to be. The passive tense used by Mark in 16:4 indicates that the stone had been rolled away once and for all and signals that Mark understood this to be God’s action. What needed to happen to open the tomb had already occurred.

Who is this young man, who is waiting there to greet them so early in the morning? Through the centuries, most scholars have thought him to be an angel, a messenger from God, since his role is to pass on the good news that Jesus is no longer there in a

dead man’s tomb. Yet, some have recalled that young man in 14:51–52 and imagined a connection in which he (robed again in the linen garment he left in Gethsemane as he fled) has now become God’s messenger, even as the other disciples, who deserted Jesus, will one day carry this good news to the whole world. (See “Close Encounters of an Angelic Kind,” p. 12.)

Whoever he is, it may help to hear his full message to break it down phrase by phrase by writing in the missing phrases on the chart below.

The women are said to be alarmed, but the young man instructs them not to be. Their sense of amazement and awe as they fled the tomb was also the crowd’s reaction to Jesus following the Transfiguration in 9:15. (See “Mothering, Mentoring, and Mercy,” p. 16.)

The messenger identifies Jesus in three ways: as the man from Nazareth, as the crucified, and as the one who has been raised or resurrected. All three are crucial to the way that Christians understand Jesus’ identity, but the latter two identifications have now emerged in these last chapters of the Gospel.

The women are then invited to see the place where

VERSE IN MARK	MESSENGER'S WORDS TO THE WOMEN
16:6	Do not be alarmed
	Look, there is the place they laid him
16:7	But go
	just as he told you.

he was laid—the empty tomb—for themselves. This is the very tomb in which they witnessed Jesus' body being placed, lest any argue that they had simply come to the wrong location.

What follows is a primer on the life of a disciple. From this Easter morning forward, disciples are those who go, tell, and follow Jesus into Galilee, the place Jesus said he would meet the disciples in 14:28. The reference to Galilee anticipates the wider mission of the church as this good news spreads beyond Jerusalem into the Gentile communities of Galilee and finally throughout the world. (See "Go and Tell," p. 22.)

The message is direct, succinct, and confident. As readers of the gospel in the 21st century, we know that the gospel did indeed spread. In fact, even in Mark 13, the gospel writer alluded to the witness (and the trials) of the faithful.

But to the women, these words could not have sounded more outlandish and unbelievable. In the early dawn, just a day after witnessing such a violent death of a beloved friend, they are unable to comprehend that Jesus' words—that he would be raised from the dead—are true. Besides, the very disciples to whom they are to carry this message have all run away. Nothing makes sense. What are they to do?

Verse 8 puts it simply. They, too, run away. Full of both terror and amazement, they flee and say nothing.

2. The young man at the empty tomb instructs the women to tell the other disciples what they have seen and heard. They are to point the way for the mission of the church despite their amazement and fear. Why do you think they were silent rather than ready to go forward on that day?
3. Imagine that the silence of the women had been the last word in the Gospel of Mark. Would that offer a satisfying ending to the story of Jesus?

The Rest of the Story

READ MARK 16:9–20.

The narrative continues with three post-resurrection snapshots, which were probably added to the original text in the second century. They are not made-up accounts. Each is similar to the post-Easter testimonies in other gospels. Do you recognize the parallel stories?

Mark 16:9–11 names Mary Magdalene as the first of those women to find the courage to speak. This happens after she encounters the Risen Christ and parallels a much longer account in John 20:14–18.

Mark 16:12–13 involves an encounter between the Risen Christ and a pair of disciples as they were walking. This is similar to the story of the Road to Emmaus in Luke 24:13–35.

The third account in Mark 16:14–18 includes an appearance of the Risen Christ to the 11 disciples, much like John 20:19–23 and this also captures elements of the commissioning of the disciples in Matthew 28:19. The passage also includes images of the amazing power and courage of the first believers in the Book of Acts.

4. Where and when has the story of Jesus being raised from the dead come alive for you? Are there particular hymns that help you move from fear and timidity to joy and boldness in your own life?

These glimpses of the disciples in the days immediately following Jesus' resurrection recall the theme of seeing and not seeing, hearing but not really hearing or understanding, that described the response of many to Jesus all through his public ministry.

Jesus upbraids the 11 for their lack of trust and stubbornness (16:14). The tone here is harsh and condemning, suggesting that there is no excuse for dithering or holding back in one's response. It is a cautionary word not only for the 11 but for all disciples.

The tone switches dramatically in verse 15 as the once-upbraided disciples are immediately commissioned to proclaim the good news to the whole creation

or cosmos. No one—no thing—now exists apart from the life-transforming news that the crucified Jesus is also the resurrected Jesus. (See “The Gospel in Ascension and Pentecost,” p. 34.)

Mark 16:16 continues the demarcation of those who trust this news and those who continue to discount its power. While this can seem off-putting in our 21st century context of interfaith dialogue and respect for other religious traditions, consider how empowering these verses would have been for Christians in times of persecution or when they were a minority within the Roman Empire.

The longer ending to the Gospel of Mark concludes not with the silence and fear of the women at the tomb, but with the ascension of the Lord Jesus into heaven, where he is now seated in the place of power at the right hand of God. Though their friend from Nazareth may no longer be walking the roads of Galilee with the disciples, the last verse assures us that the Risen Christ was working with them and that the good news was being shared—everywhere. (See “Silent Proclamations,” p. 6.)

5. Have you known people who made extreme sacrifices or endured particular hardships to live and witness as Christians? What were some of the sacrifices they made?
6. Jesus upbraids the very disciples that he then commissions to go out to share the good news. Both upbraiding and commissioning are important messages for us to hear. How do you make sense of your own experiences of falling short of God’s expectations and your experiences of taking daily steps to live out your baptism? Why are both messages important to hear in the biblical witness?

Almost the End

All the verses have been read, but there is still one more part to the conclusion of Mark’s Gospel. Because it was written as a gospel account and used through the centu-

ries to invite people to follow the Jesus way of life, these chapters beg for one more word. In fact, some copies of this text in ancient manuscripts included the word *Amen* after verse 20. *Amen* means *it is so*, or *let it be so*, and indicates the affirmation of the reader.

Whether or not your study group has been keeping a chart of disciples in the Gospel of Mark, it is now time to add your own names. As one biblical scholar writes, “Mark’s ending is no end; only the reader can bring closure.” (Lamar Williamson, *Mark Interpretation Commentary*, John Knox Press, 1983)

7. If you still have a copy of Session 1, look back at the questions your group named at the start of this Bible study. Which of those have been answered? Which are questions will you need to live with longer?

Conclusion

During these nine sessions, you have had an opportunity to read nearly 700 verses of the Gospel of Mark. Whether or not you managed to cover all of them in your group discussion, you have heard the story of Jesus unfold. In addition, you have had opportunities

If Time Permits: An Open Exchange

In Session 1, “a certain young man” (Mark 14:51–52) was introduced as a model for a thoughtful conversation partner, interested in your study but not necessarily a part of the church. If you have had such a partner throughout this study, take time to meet once more. Read together Mark 16:1–8. Then, consider these questions.

8. Churches present a public face to the world by their actions as well as their formal theology. What examples of resurrection living have you witnessed? What evidence is there that the story of Easter means anything to Christians after the holiday is over?

to listen to one another and to share your own heart-felt reflections as disciples who have been called to follow this crucified and risen Jesus.

You are part of the great company of women who, following in the footsteps of those sisters at the empty tomb, have discovered the gift of God's grace. As we saw in the life of Jesus and those he encountered between Nazareth and Jerusalem, this gift of divine grace provides courage stronger than fear and opens up a way of life more powerful than death.

Whether you have been an experienced reader riding up front as your group made this journey through this Gospel, or a novice reader often listening from your seat and taking in the comments of others, you have accomplished a great thing. You have opened the Bible and trusted that by reading and studying together you, too,

could learn afresh what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Thanks for coming along, and blessings on the next leg of your journey.

Closing Prayer

As we come to the end of this study, O God, help us to see that we are always at a place of fresh beginning as your disciples. Show us now how you would have us turn what we have learned into faithful service and daring witness. Kindle in us a lifelong desire to learn from your Holy Word. We pray in the name of the Risen Christ, Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Patricia Lull is executive director of the St. Paul Area Council of Churches (www.spacc.org). An ELCA pastor, she has served as a parish pastor, director of campus ministry in the ELCA, and as dean of students at Luther Seminary, St. Paul, Minn.

COMING UP

gather BIBLE STUDIES

June and July/August 2012: Along the Way

Have you ever taken a classic summer road trip with family or friends? If so, you know the conversations you have along the way are an important part of the journey. Your spiritual life can change and grow as you travel. What began as a road trip might become a pilgrimage.

In this study, we'll meet some biblical travelers, enter in conversation with them, and explore our own journeys of faith. The writer, the Rev. Julie A. Kanarr, is an ELCA pastor from Port Townsend, Wash.

September 2012–May 2013: Gathered by God

In the beginning, God gathers the waters at creation, making order out of chaos and forming the lands. The Israelites gather manna in the wilderness, shepherds gather their sheep, and kings gather their people. Exiles are gathered from afar when God brings them back to the land. Nations gather for war; the assembly gathers for worship; pilgrims gather for festivals; crowds gather around Jesus. Disciples gather for prayer and whole cities gather to hear prophets, priests, and preachers tell of the deeds that God has done.

We, too, gather in our everyday lives. Friends and family gather to share a meal, witness a wedding, grieve a loss, celebrate a life. People gather to work for justice, campaign against hunger, and offer service.

We gather to support one another and we gather to learn. We gather our voices in song and prayer.

As communities of faith we are gathered for rest, for shelter, for life, and for sharing stories that remind us who we are. We are gathered to be empowered and to be sent as God's witnesses.

Join us as we gather to explore some of the many ways that we are "Gathered by God." Audrey West, who holds a doctorate in New Testament from Duke University, will help us learn what it means to be gathered by God. West is the author of the award-winning 2004–05 Bible study, *Everyday Surprises: The Parables of Jesus*, published in *Lutheran Woman Today* (now *Gather* magazine).

THE GOSPEL IN ASCENSION AND PENTECOST

by Gail Ramshaw

The evangelist Luke was a skilled storyteller, and he used creative symbolic imagery to narrate the Christian feast days of Ascension and Pentecost. Some 50 years after Jesus' death and resurrection, Luke penned our lectionary readings for Ascension Day (Luke 24:44–53 and Acts 1:1–11) and Pentecost

(Acts 2:1–21). No other New Testament writer—Paul, Mark, Matthew, John, or the anonymous authors of other epistles—refers to such events on the 40th and the 50th days after Jesus' resurrection.

Believers treasure Luke's gospel narratives; his chronology is set into our liturgical year.

One meaning of the word *gospel* is the *good news* that God saves the world. How can a story about Jesus ascending above the clouds be good news? How can we receive with gladness a narrative about tongues of fire burning on the disciples' heads? Luke wrapped up the gospel in ancient images—the three-tier universe, 40 days, heaven, wind, tongues of fire—and we must unwrap the packages to find the gift of the gospel inside.

THE GOSPEL IN THE ASCENSION

The Three-Tier Universe. Scholars tell us that learned people in the first century no longer thought the earth was flat. The ancient Greeks had described a round earth. Yet many authors use poetic pictures as backgrounds for their words. In his narrative, Luke

employed archaic poetic language called the three-tier universe, which still shows up when we say “the sun has come up.”

Looking at this cosmology (or the universe as a whole), the world is composed of three levels. The dead are underground in Hades; the living in



In the 12th century, Hildegard of Bingen drew this depiction of the Trinity. In the Ascension, Jesus brings humanity into God.

the middle; and all things above are heavenly bodies such as the sun, moon, planets, and spiritual beings like angels and God. Many churches display a painting of this three-tier universe, with only the feet of the ascending Jesus seen, his body on its way to heaven. But this depiction suggests a Divine Absence, the opposite of what the gospel proclaims.

Christian preachers over the ages have searched for the gospel inside this archaic cosmology. In the fifth century, Pope Leo preached that Christ ascended into the sacraments. Thus the risen Christ is present in the bread and wine. In the 16th century, Martin Luther preached that Christ ascended into the cosmos. Christ is no longer bound to an area on earth, but being with God, he fills the entire universe.

More recently, it has been preached that in the ascension, Christ brought humanity into God. Thus God is no longer an alien force far removed from the human condition, for humankind is contained in God. The three-tier universe can be a metaphor for our life: we live in the middle, with death and evil below, and life and grace above. Christ both goes down to death and Hades, and up to life and heaven, for Christ is all in all. And if we tie Luke's narrative to Matthew's parable of the Last Judgment, then Christ ascended down into the least of our needy brothers and sisters. To find Christ, we go to the needy.

Forty days. Luke places the ascension on the 40th day after the resurrection. In the Bible, 40 measures a symbolic waiting period. Think 40 days: the flood's rains, Moses on Sinai, the spies scouting Canaan, the taunting of Goliath, Elijah walking to the mountain of God, Ezekiel lying on his right side, the threat hanging over Nineveh, Jesus' temptation, the recovery of a mother after bearing a son.

And 40 years: Israel in the wilderness; Israel controlled by the Philistines; the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon. Perhaps for a people with a lunar calendar,

40 meant a time beyond the normal reckoning of 28 days. Yet neither for Luke nor for us does 40 days have a literal meaning, though we also have periods of waiting. We wait for a promise, or a hope, or a threat, or simply for one day to come after another. And then the event arrives, the presence of God realized once more, a surprising sign of grace. We change during these 40 days, or we don't. Forty was only a human reckoning, but the truth of divine grace is that God was always there with mercy, whether or not we realized it. Yes, Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days, but Noah and the animals were protected from death for 40 days.

Heaven. An image central to Ascension Day is heaven, a word with many connotations. Often in the Bible, heaven means merely the sky, the space above the earth. For ancient Greek philosophers, heaven was the realm where immortal souls dwell throughout eternity. For medieval believers, heaven meant being near God. The idea of heaven as an endless summer camp, where we enjoy picnics with all our dead relatives, was popularized in the 19th century. Some hymns speak of heaven as endless rest, an idea that is much more appealing to people who are overworked than to those with long vacations and decades in retirement.

So how can we illumine the language of *heaven*? In explaining "Our Father in Heaven" in the Lord's Prayer, fourth century theologian Cyril of Jerusalem said heaven is the community of faithful in which God dwells. In his gospel, Matthew tells us *heaven* is a religiously careful way to say God. When people ask us what heaven is, we can say simply, God. At the end of me, of the community, of the universe, is God, and this is good news. Others may say that what remains is chaos, or evil, or nothing, but Christians rejoice to say that what remains is God.

So opening up the gift of Ascension, we find the gospel or good news that Christ is no longer dead, bur-

ied in the earth, but through God fills the universe with the power of love. Though we may experience our 40 days as empty, they actually contain the mercy of God. We need not fear death, for after our life is the good news of the presence and power of God.

THE GOSPEL ON PENTECOST

Wind. In Hebrew, the single noun *ruah* can mean wind, breath, and spirit. In Genesis 1, when God's *ruah* hovers over the waters, translators render this as "God's spirit," "God's breath," or "the wind from God." So in Luke's imagination, the Spirit of Christ that comes from God can be described as a wind—a wind that is not a natural wind, but the very breath of God.

For Luke to say that when all the believers had assembled, there came "from heaven" a sound like "a violent wind," he was not describing a natural phenomenon, such as a destructive hurricane. Rather, he used picture-language to say that like the breath of God, the power of the risen Christ is present within the community of the faithful. God exhales love, and that love shakes the earth.

Tongues of fire. For his narrative of Pentecost, Luke Christianized the Jewish festival of Pentecost. Called also the Feast of Weeks, the Jewish celebration originally celebrated the barley harvest. In Luke's time, the festival was an urban festival commemorating the giving of the law at Sinai. According to Exodus 19, God descended onto the top of a mountain in fire and smoke to proclaim the covenant to the chosen people. Luke assumed his readers knew about Sinai, and he reused its imagery to proclaim the gospel.

Now, wrote Luke, God descends, not onto a monument of nature, but into the community of believers. Fire appears, not in some kind of volcano, but on the head of each person. And the whole world—not only one ancient tribe—is called to hear the word of God. The Christian Pentecost layers atop the Jewish story

that God visits the people with a covenant of mercy. Pentecost is the wonder of Sinai renewed by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Fire on foreheads is not some bizarre, hard-to-believe miracle. Rather, the fire represents the presence of God, once on Sinai, now given today to each believer.

In the ritual of baptism, we pour water on the forehead of the believer. In baptism we—how odd is this?!—we symbolize fire with water. Biblical images can be as complex as real life: two-sided, more than they appear, and possibly containing opposites. Each believer is now a walking living Sinai, carrying on one's forehead the very presence of God.

The fire that we gathered around at the Easter Vigil illumines our way as believers, enlightening our days with the burning wonder of the resurrection. The Spirit is the presence among us of the risen Christ. As the "Thanksgiving at the Table VII" in *Evangelical Lutheran Worship* says it, we pray to receive God's Spirit, "whose breath revives us for life, whose fire rouses us to love," and this is the gospel of Pentecost.

THE EASTER GOSPEL AGAIN

Luke has spun out the gospel of Easter into the narratives of Ascension and Pentecost. Christ is no longer dead, but is alive, permeating the universe. The Spirit of the risen Christ has been breathed into the community of believers, and we are on fire with devotion to the divine and service to all in need. The 50 days of Easter remind us that the Resurrection is not a single blow-out celebration. Rather, the Christian life is always Easter over and over.

The Triune God lives to renew the face of the earth, and the good news is that God gathers us all into Christ's mysterious journey from death to life. 🌿

Gail Ramshaw is a Lutheran scholar of liturgical language who lives in Philadelphia. Her book *Treasures Old and New* (Augsburg Fortress Publishers) discusses 40 of the images that are found in the three-year lectionary readings.

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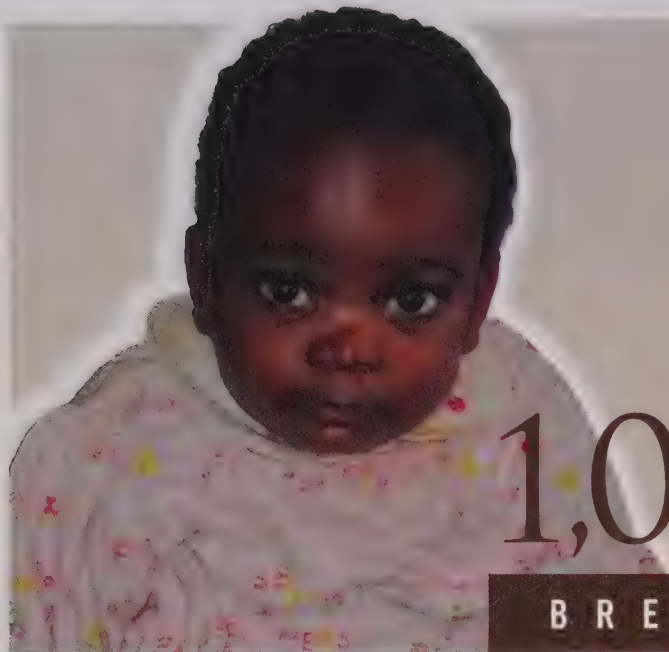
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by Inez Torres Davis

1,000 DAYS

BREAD FOR THE WORLD

I remember Juliet's eyes. Those who received her after she was left in the trash figured Juliet was about three months old. Her eyes were one of the brightest pairs at the pediatric clinic we visited in Lusaka, Zambia.

I took Juliet's picture and I have looked at those eyes with wonder many times since I have been back home in Illinois. Dear, sweet Juliet, did your mother die and leave only you behind? When you were placed in a trash can, did someone pray you would be found? Juliet was discovered by a passerby who brought her to the clinic.

It is common around the world to undervalue girls. China only recently (in 2010) launched a campaign against sex-selective abortion to end the tradition of valuing boys over girls. While visiting Bangalore, India, in early 2000 I was confronted

with the infanticide of girl babies because having girls meant families had to have wealth for a dowry, while having boys meant the household got added help and possibly an increase in their future net worth by marrying a dowry-bearing bride.

BREAD FOR THE WORLD

At the 2011 triennial convention in Spokane, Wash., Women of the ELCA delegates voted to support the 1,000 Day Movement. Later, I was invited to participate in Bread for the World's trip to Africa, as part of their 1,000 Days campaign. We went to Zambia, Malawi, and Tanzania.

One of our first stops was a visit to a pediatric ward in Zambia that treats malnourished children. It was here that I noticed almost all of the stunted children being treated in the clinic were boys. When I asked for

the reason for this gender imbalance, I was told that boys are more valued than girls in this country, so families are more likely to bring in a starving boy child than a starving girl child.

Both girls and boys are cared for within the international movement called 1,000 Days. The Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) and 1,000 Days Movement partnerships encourage countries to make a political commitment to these efforts. The things that improve nutrition are often simple interventions such as hand-washing, breastfeeding, supplementing and fortifying foods with micronutrients, and treating malnutrition.

U.S. citizens can take some pride in knowing that the United States (through Secretary of State Hillary Clinton) along with Irish Aid has led the way internationally

in advocating for funding nations to Scale Up Nutrition (SUN) for children and mothers in developing countries. We should advocate with our representatives in Washington, D.C., for this aid to continue.

WHY A THOUSAND DAYS?

The 1,000 Days movement promotes maternal and child nutrition in the 1,000 days between pregnancy and age 2. Malnutrition in this time period leads to permanent cognitive and physical delays, poor school attendance and educational achievements—and eventually lower earning potential that can mean a 2 percent to 3 percent loss in GDP. Children who are properly nourished resist disease better throughout their lives, stay in school longer, and earn more income as adults.

Part of our work as denominational representatives with Bread for the World was visiting local religious leaders, government officials, and USAID staff working on nutrition. We were excited to see billboards and posters in both Zambia and Malawi that said, “SUN 1,000 Special Days” and “Uniting to End Stunting” along with material that encourages breast feeding. Change is happening on the ground in these countries.

In developing countries, the low status of rural women contributes to high rates of food insecurity and malnutrition among children as

well. Women suffer twice the rate of malnutrition as men. Girls are twice as likely to die from malnutrition as boys. Malnourished women give birth to malnourished children and are at risk of death during childbirth. Malnutrition increases the risk that a pregnant woman who is HIV-positive will pass the virus on to her baby.

The opposite is also true: A child born to a mother who can read is 50 percent more likely to survive past her 5th birthday. Each extra year of a mother’s education reduces the probability of infant mortality by 5 to 10 percent.

In our visits to rural communities in Malawi, we saw how nutrition can best be improved at the community level. We witnessed how planning and implementation requires local input from mothers, fathers, and family and village leaders. Digging latrines and hand washing gave one village a cholera-free year.

The childhood stunting rates in the three countries we visited is near 50 percent. The issue is both access and education. Dr. Cassim Masi, the executive director of the Food and Nutrition Commission in Zambia, put it best when he told us, “Food is the first medicine.”

A CIRCLE OF PROTECTION

Bread for the World is building an interdenominational coalition of

women of faith who have decided advocacy will also have a domestic component. In the United States, too, there are mothers and children who are not properly nourished in the first 1,000 days. They face greater mortality rates. Children have decreased mental capacity and poorer overall health throughout their lifetimes.

We invite you to talk about the 1,000 Day Movement within your own setting. You can visit www.ThousandDays.org to learn how to become engaged. The website provides ideas and ways to have conversations that lead to education and advocacy. Talk with your members of Congress. Ask them to form a circle of protection around programs that support nutrition in the 1,000 Days—programs such as WIC (Women, Infants and Children), SNAP (formerly food stamps), Feed the Future, and the Global Health Movement.

As Women of the ELCA, our advocacy is a byproduct of our faith in a God that has claimed the world and all that is in it through Jesus. It puts us in solidarity with the least among us.

To find out more about joining the conversation, you can contact Inez Torres Davis at ineztorres.davis@elca.org or visit www.bread.org/go/1000days to learn more. 🌿
Inez Torres Davis is Women of the ELCA director for justice.



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GRACE NOTES

Guidance and Encouragement

by Linda Post Bushkofsky



“Kiss it and make it all better, Nonna.” I hear this plea, on average, at least once a day from my grandson. Whether it’s a stubbed toe, a skinned knee, or a tap on the head from the cat, Jayden believes a kiss from Nonna has healing powers. My heart melts when I hear those words.

Like me, you probably remember a simpler time in your life when you believed that a kiss from your mother could solve any problem. That was before you knew about mortgage payments, performance reviews, or downward economic trends, to name just a few things that test us as adults. Think of the challenges that you are currently facing. Would you like someone to help you through those challenges, an adult-sized equivalent of “Nonna, kiss it and make it all better”? Then get yourself a mentor.

Simply defined, a mentor is a wise and trusted teacher, guide, or adviser. A mentor is often a more senior or older person, but younger people can serve as mentors to those older than them too. A mentor offers friendship, guidance, and encouragement to another person. A mentor is a good listener, too. Mentors help other people recognize their skills and achieve their potential.

There are lots of formal mentoring programs, especially those designed for an adult mentor and a younger person. For our purposes, though, I’m suggesting that a lot of mentoring happens within Women of the ELCA even though we don’t call it that. Whether it’s within a Bible study circle, at a retreat, or during a

service group project, women offer friendship, guidance, and encouragement to one another. For those of us who’ve experienced that, we know how valuable those friendships are. That’s what brought me into the women’s organization 25 years ago and has kept me here since.

For those who long for such friendship, guidance, and encouragement, Women of the ELCA is a place where you can find that and so much more—a place where shared spiritual values form the foundation for lifelong friendships. In Women of the ELCA you’ll find experienced friends who will help you navigate not only your spiritual journey but also the day-to-day worries and the big roadblocks in life. The challenges in life become more manageable when shared with friends. That’s what living in community is all about.

Because some readers have told me so, I know that some of you have tried to find a place within Women of the ELCA in your congregation and you’ve been overtly or subtly rebuked. It pains me to hear this. But I ask you not to give up on Women of the ELCA. A caring and supportive community does exist, perhaps with another group of women in your congregation or in a neighboring congregation. Maybe you’ll find that community within Café or on Facebook. Maybe your community will begin to form at a synodical or churchwide gathering. Wherever you find it, friendship and encouragement will be yours. 🌿

Linda Post Bushkofsky is executive director of Women of the ELCA.



AMEN!

Astonishing News

by Catherine Malotky

The young man at the tomb invited the women to go and tell. I can imagine that Jesus had done much for them, and their grief at his death had to have been overwhelming. Now, according to Mark's telling, they are confronted with even more astounding news: that he has risen from the dead.

Much of me can understand this. I would be struck silent, too. Thankfully there have been very few times in my life when news has come like an unseen truck, and in a moment changed my life forever. So, what was it like for them, who had watched the life ebb from their friend and teacher? Who watched his humiliation and powerlessness? Who watched the mob turn on him and the passersby gawk at his agony? Certainly they were still numb.

How could they integrate such astonishing news? Resurrection? These things simply do not happen! They faced a moment that might have been joyful, had it made any sense at all. They could not *know*, in those first moments, what a profound difference this would make, but they must have *felt* it. This was big.

Go and tell. These are our instructions too, we modern-day believers. But, do we?

God, can I trace the impact of your love in my life? I do not mean reciting doctrine, or even feeding back the great theology I have learned. I mean, what difference have you made to me, God? How am I different because I claim you as my God? How have you been good news—resurrection news?

O source of hope, you have reminded me that you are a wisdom well beyond my capacity as a human. Though my forebears ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, I cannot fully understand. You, God, have the big picture. You can teach me to see broader and deeper, with a humility that confesses my shortsightedness.

O source of new life, that empty tomb—frightening and dumbfounding as it was—is the embodiment of your promise to bring new life out of every death. When I suffer loss, when I am lost, when I am languishing, you promise to renew me. That promise, of itself, can and has helped me bear my grief. I can endure because I believe you will grow me, and even my pain will be an agent of good.

O source of welcome, you love me. On this I can fix my gaze, train my ears, and orient my path. You have given me, gifted and with intention, to the world. I have value to you because I *am*, well before I *do*. Though the opinion of others matters, your love is more than all. You count me worthy, even if imperfect. You count me valuable, and I have purpose. You count me as yours, and I belong.

O risen Christ, your empty tomb is my joy. You call me out into the world to give witness to your impact on my life, so that others might also find a home in you. Help me find my voice. In Jesus' name. Amen. 🌿

The Rev. Catherine Malotky, an ELCA pastor, serves at Luther Seminary as a philanthropic adviser. She has served as a parish pastor, editor, teacher, and retreat leader.

WE MAKE PILLOWCASE DRESSES

The women of Zion Amor Lutheran Church, Battle Lake, Minn., have been busy working on a new mission project: making pillowcase dresses for Hope 4 Women International's "Dress A Girl Around the World" campaign. H4WI is a program of Hope 4 Kids International (www.hope4kidsinternational.org/h4wi), a Christian organization based in Arizona.

The women at Zion Church have



held two workshops about the project and made more than 100 dresses. The material was donated by members of the congregation.

To date, Hope 4 Women International has delivered nearly 49,000 dresses to 55 countries, including the United

States. To learn how to make pillowcase dresses, visit the website: www.dressagirlaroundtheworld.com. Each year, a group of volunteers from Zion goes to Jamaica, so some of the dresses will be delivered to the little girls there.

—submitted by Carol Gealow

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